

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
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FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9403
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY PARIS
USMISSION USLO PEKING
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 0744

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, EAID, FR, LA
SUBJECT: FRENCH EXODUS FROM LAOS

REF: VIENTIANE 0729

SUMMARY: THE DEPARTURE OF MOST OF THE FRENCH DEPRIVES THE
LAO OF WHAT THEY CONSIDERED TO BE A DISRUPTIVE INFLUENCE.
IT ALSO DEPRIVES THEM OF MUCH TECHNICAL AND EDUCATIONAL
SUPPORT. THE QUESTION ARISES AS TO HOW THE COMMUNISTS WILL
REACT AND AS TO HOW THEY WILL PLAY OUT THEIR VARIOUS
RIVALRIES IN THE LAO ARENA. END SUMMARY.

1. FRENCH AMBASSADOR ROGER DUZER LEFT VIENTIANE JULY 3. HE
WAS A PASSENGER ON THE SECOND OF TWO SPECIAL FLIGHTS TO
BANGKOK FOR APPROXIMATELY 80 FRENCH OFFICIALS, SPOUSES, AND
CHILDREN. THE FRENCH HAD BEEN ORDERED BY THE LAO GOVERNMENT
TO REDUCE THEIR OFFICIAL PRESENCE IN THE LPDR TO ONE
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DIPLOMAT AND FIVE NON-DIPLOMATIC ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF,
THE SAME AS THE LAO PRESENCE IN PARIS (REFTEL).

2. THE REMAINING OFFICIAL FRENCH PRESENCE STILL INCLUDES
A FEW AID TECHNICIANS, WHOSE CONTRACTS ARE EXPIRING.
BY SEPTEMBER, THERE WILL BE ONLY TWO LEFT, BOTH DOCTORS
AT MAHOSOT HOSPITAL. THEIR CONTRACTS WILL RUN OUT LATER

IN THE YEAR. THE FRENCH EMBASSY PHYSICIAN, ON WHOM WE HAD BEEN RELYING FOR PRIMARY MEDICAL CARE, HAS LEFT AND WILL NOT BE RETURNING.

3. ALTHOUGH MOST OF THE DEPARTING FRENCH WERE GLAD TO LEAVE A PLACE WHERE THEY HAD FOUND IT INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT TO LIVE AND WORK, THE ATMOSPHERE AT THE AIRPORT WAS GLOOMY. NEARLY EVERYONE THOUGHT THE SUDDEN DETERIORATION IN FRANCO-LAO RELATIONS WAS UNNECESSARY, WOULD HURT A GREAT MANY INNOCENT PEOPLE, AND WOULD NEVER HAVE TAKEN PLACE HAD THE SITUATION BEEN HANDLED SLIGHTLY DIFFERENTLY.

4. IT IS EVIDENT, HOWEVER, BASED ON A JULY 4 ENCOUNTER WITH MFA UNDER SECRETARY SOUBANH, THAT THE LAO MEANT TO DO WHAT THEY DID. THEY WERE CONVINCED THAT THE FRENCH WERE ENGAGED IN SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITY. WHEN I REMARKED TO SOUBANH THAT IT WAS SAD THAT AMBASSADOR DUZER HAD HAD TO LEAVE, SOUBANH MADE A FACE AND FIRMLY ASSERTED THAT THE FRENCH WERE ENGAGED IN IMPROPER ACTIVITIES. (COMMENT: IT ALL DEPENDS ON YOUR POINT OF VIEW. THE FRENCH STILL TAKE REFUGEES AND IN THE PAST HAVE TAKEN THE MOST IMPORTANT FIGURES IN THE FORMER REGIME. AS A RESULT OF THEIR LONGSTANDING RELATIONSHIP WITH LAOS, THE FRENCH ALSO HAVE EXCELLENT LOCAL CONTACTS AND SOURCES OF INFORMATION. TO AN IMPARTIAL OBSERVER, ALL THIS

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SEEMS PERFECTLY NORMAL, EVEN WHEN YOU ADD IN SOME OF DCM LAMBERT'S LESS DISCREET, ANTI-LAO COMMENTS. TO THE LAO, HOWEVER, GIVEN THEIR POST-COLONIAL MENTALITY AND THEIR CURRENT PROBLEMS WITH DISAFFECTION AND INSURGENCY, IT IS ALL IMPROPER AND SUBVERSIVE.)

5. THE PRESENCE OF THE NEW LAO CHIEF OF PROTOCOL AT DUZER'S AIRPORT SENDOFF INDICATES THAT THE LAO ARE BEING CAREFUL TO OBSERVE THE DIPLOMATIC NICETIES. SOME OF THEM, DESPITE SOUBANH'S STATEMENTS, MAY EVEN BE A BIT DISMAYED AT WHAT HAS HAPPENED. THE NEXT THING TO WATCH WILL BE WHETHER AND HOW THE LAO TAKE ACTION AGAINST THE REMAINING NON-OFFICIAL FRENCH RESIDENTS, SOME OF WHOSE PAPERS THE FOREIGN MINISTRY HAS ALREADY SAID WERE "NOT IN ORDER."

6. IN THE SHORT AND MEDIUM TERM, THE LAO WILL LOSE THE TECHNICAL AND EDUCATIONAL SERVICES WHICH THE FRENCH PROVIDED. THEY WILL ALSO LOSE WHAT THEY CONSIDERED TO BE AN INTOLERABLE LEVEL OF DISRUPTIVE WESTERN, NEOCOLONIAL INFLUENCE. THE LPDR WILL THUS CONTINUE TOWARD ITS APPARENT GOAL OF RETURNING TO A "Purer," SELF-SUFFICIENT

SUBSISTENCE SOCIETY--A GENTLER, LESS DRASTIC VERSION OF WHAT HAS EVIDENTLY TAKEN PLACE IN CAMBODIA. THE QUESTION ARISES AS TO WHAT SORT OF ROLE IN THE LONG RUN THIS PASTORAL, COLLECTIVIST, AND ESSENTIALLY REACTIONARY NATIONAL VISION INCLUDES FOR FOREIGN AND PARTICULARLY FOREIGN COMMUNIST INFLUENCE. THE QUESTION ALSO ARISES AS TO HOW THE COMMUNIST POWERS HERE--VIETNAMESE, SOVIET, CHINESE, AND EASTERN EUROPEAN--WILL PLAY OUT THEIR VARIOUS RIVALRIES.
ROBERTS

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